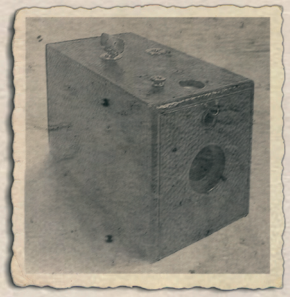
The Miracle of Bremen

How Karl Anton Breitenhut disappeared from a photography



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The Miracle of Bremen

How Karl Anton Breitenhut disappeared from a photography

In 1916 the *Bremer Illustrierte Zeitung* published an article about the Bremen based merchant Karl Anton Breitenhut entitled *The Miracle of Bremen*. Breitenhut, born in Bremerhaven in 1887, disappeared one day from a photo that showed him in his grandmother‘s garden. The photo, taken by his Grandmother in 1911, showed a section of the garden with a conspicuous gap where Karl Anton Breitenhut once stood. Using a photo of the photo, it was possible to reconstruct that the person had actually been in the photo. A piece of cardboard with the note: „I‘ll be right back“ was stuck in the picture frame.

An analysis of the writing was ordered and revealed that it was indeed in Breitenhut‘s handwriting, although his denying that he had ever written such a note. His photographic persona stayed absent for three years until 1914, when a cigarette card collector from New York, USA, found a card with the likeness of Breitenhut in a pack of *Turf Cigarettes*. These trading cards usually featured American actors, which is why the german born collector Walther Claudius stated, was

Karl Anton Breitenhut in 1898 at the age of 11 years in Bremen

Karl Anton Breitenhut in 1889 at the age of two years

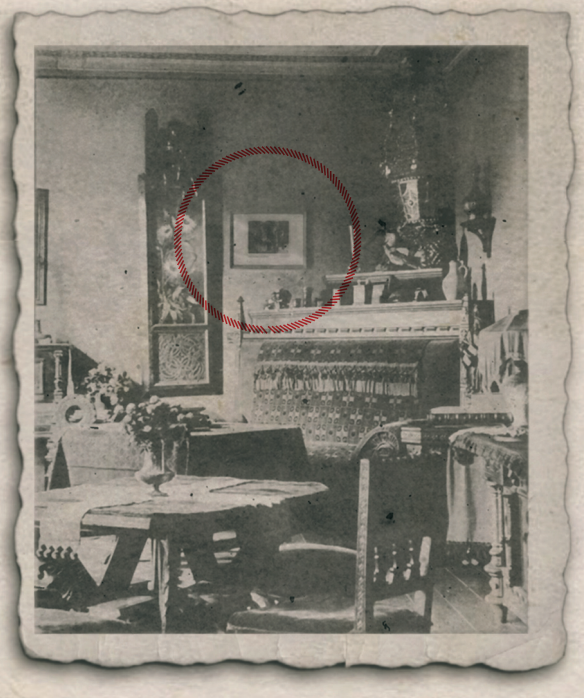
amazed and confused by a person with a german name and the addition *Out of the garden* that was located at the bottom of the trading card.

This strange find only came to light years later when a German emigrant from Bremen, Matthias Krauss, who was a friend of Breitenhut's, got his hands on this card and approached him. At the time, Breitenhut was beside himself, irrational with fear and avoided constandly of being photographed.

In 1915, Breitenhut appeared for the second time in a photograph by Heinrich Koehn from Bielefeld. The photo showing the Church square in Herford/Westphalia and was suddenly supplemented by the person of Breitenhut.

Manipulations on the part of Koehns could not be ruled out, since the man was a photographer who was not very happy about the surprising change in his photography. As luck would have it, Breitenhut disappeared from the photo again after two weeks, and this time without commenting in the form of a strip of cardboard. Heinrich Koehn, who photographed the amazing event, refrained from complaining because his picture was fully restored.

A year later in 1916 Breitenhut made a short appearance in an middle class painting besides an allee of trees and some sheep for a



clockwise:

Breitenhut's living room with the photograph in the background

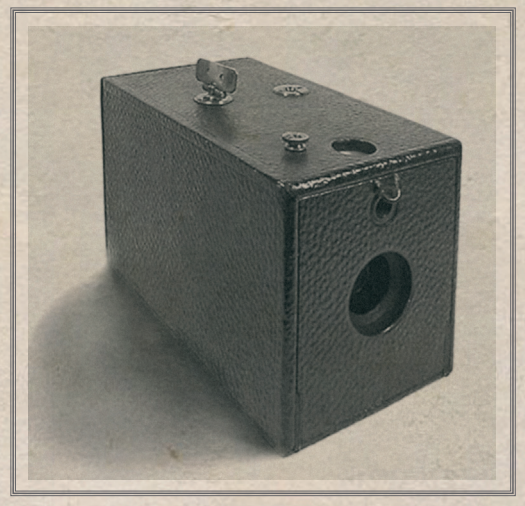
N/A Breitenhut with his sister and his bride in Bremen in 1910

A photo from happy days at the outdoor pool in Bremen, 1900

couple of days. After these incidents it became quiet around Karl Anton Breitenhut and his independent photographic reproduction. To this day, the circumstances under which the events of 1911 - 1915 took place are unclear and unsolved.

In 1915, Karl Anton Breitenhut filed a criminal complaint against himself, i.e. against his photograph. However, the investigations by the Bremen police authorities were discontinued in the same year on the grounds of *gross mischief and causing a public nuisance*. The camera with which the photo was taken in his grandmother's garden was seized by the Bremen police and examined in detail, but without any further success. The photographs and the camera were the subject of an exhibition on *Supernatural Apparitions* in Berlin in the 1920s. It is thanks to the great success of the exhibition that the documents have survived to this day in a private archive in Berlin.

Karl Anton Breitenhut was admitted to a sanatorium as a mental patient in 1917, where he lived until 1952 and wrote the libretto for an opera in 3 acts about these incidents, which has not yet been performed. He successfully kept his plan not to be photographed since 1916, which is why there are no documents from his later life.



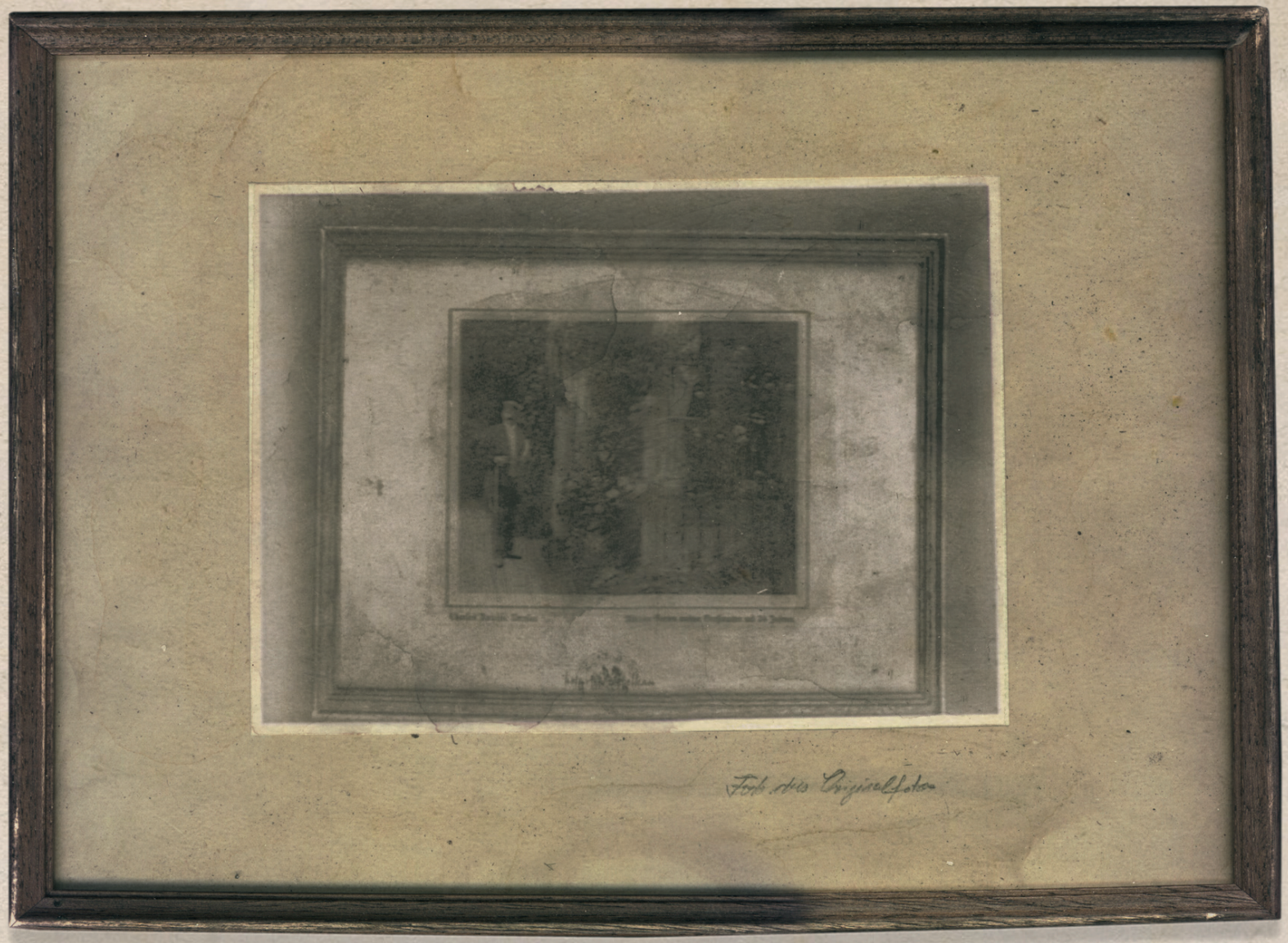
clockwise:

The camera that was used to take the photo of Breitenhut in the garden.

Documentation of a presentation of the photos and the newspaper article.

The cigarette collection card from Walther Claudius from 1914 with the image of Breitenhut.

In 1916 Breitenhut made a short appearance in an middle class painting besides an allee of trees and some sheep, but for a couple of days only.



The photograph of the garden photo in which Karl Anton Breitenhut can still be seen, underline on the right side: Photo of the original photo

The photo from Karl Anton Breitenhut's grandmother's garden, with the cardboard strip and the note: I am coming back soon!

Sections of the photograph of the garden photo by Karl Anton Breitenhut. On the left after leaving the photo and on the right still in the photo

Bremen Illustrated Newspaper No. 10, 1916

"In 1911, the Bremen based merchant Karl Anton Breitenhut miraculously disappeared from one of his photographys. The photo, which showed him at the age of 24 in his grandmother's garden in Bremen, has been hanging in the living room of his house for 6 years. The photo continued to show the garden, only the person of the Breitenhut was absent. A small strip of cardboard that was stuck into the frame indicated in pencil that Karl Anton Breitenhut would ***be back soon*** - which did not happen.

The photographic image remained untraceable for 3 years, until 1914, when an American cigarette card collector from New York found a card with the image of Karl Anton Breitenhut in a pack of *Turf Cigarettes*. In 1915, Breitenhut also appeared in a photograph by Heinrich Koehn from 1906. However, he only stayed for 2 weeks, which the owner of the photograph was very pleased about, as he found the person damaging to the composition. Fortunately, the owner and Heinrich Kuehn refrained from claiming damages.

To date, the circumstances under which these incidents occurred have not been resolved. Karl Anton Breitenhut filed a criminal complaint against himself, i.e. against his photographic reproduction, and has avoided being photographed again to this day.

If you are aware of similar incidents, or if you yourself have become a victim of such a mysterious event, contact the Bremen Police Investigation Office."

Nr. 10 Bremer Illustrirte Zeitung. 267

Das Wunder von Bremen

Karl Anton Breitenhut ,zweite Person von rechts, im Kreise seiner Familie 1908.

1911 verschwand auf wundersame Weise der Bremer Kaufmann Karl Anton Breitenhut aus einem seiner Fotos. Das Foto, das ihn im Alter von 24 Jahren im Garten seiner Großmutter in Bremen zeigt, hing seit 6 Jahren in der Wohnstube seines Hauses. Der Fotografische Ausschnitt zeigte weiterhin den Garten, nur die Person des Breitenhuts war abwesend. Ein kleiner Kartonstreifen, der in den Rahmen gesteckt war, wies Bleistiftgeschrieben darauf hin, das Karl Anton Breitenhut „gleich wiederkommen" würde - was aber nicht geschah. Das fototechnisch Abbild blieb für 3 Jahre unauffindbar, bis 1914 ein amerikanischer Zigarettenkartensammler aus New York, in einer Packung „Turf" Cigaretten eine Karte mit dem Bild Karl Anton Breitenhuts fand. 1915 erschien Breitenhut zudem auf einer Fotografie von Heinrich Koehn aus dem Jahr 1906. Er blieb allerdings nur für 2 Wochen, worüber der Besitzer der Fotografie sehr erfreut war, da er die Person als Kompositionschädigend empfand. Von einer Schadenersatzforderung sah der Besitzer sowie Heinrich Kuehn, glücklicherweise ab.

Bis heute sind die Umstände unter denen sich diese Vorfälle ereignet haben nicht aufgelöst worden. Karl Anton Breitenhut hat Strafanzeige gegen sich selbst, d.h. gegen seine Fototechnische Reproduktion gestellt, und hat es bis zum heutigen Tage vermieden, nochmals Fotografiert zu werden.

Wenn Ihnen ähnliche Vorfälle bekannt sind, oder Sie selbst Opfer eines derartigen mysteriösen Vorgangs geworden sind, wenden Sie sich an die Polizeiliche Ermittlungsstelle von Bremen.

Die amerikanische Zigaretten Sammelkarte mit dem Bild K.A. Breitenhuts.

Die Wohnstube von Karl Anton Breitenhut in Bremen. Im Hintergrund an der Wand das besagte Foto, noch mit seiner Person.

Fotografie der Fotografie von Heinrich Koehn auf dem K.A. Breitenhut vor der Kirche erschien, mit Stock und Hut.